

Birthing Your Group

A Guide for Small Group Leaders

The Challenge to Birth

- We must birth to obey the command of Christ.
Jesus' call to reach and teach the world still stands today. We must continually reach out to new people so that our groups share life. Small groups exist in community for the mission Christ called us to - making disciples.
"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit" - Matthew 28:19
- We must birth to share community.
Birthing allows new people to connect to community. With the key role groups play in the life of SOV, birthing will keep others feeling accepted and welcome and will ensure life transformation is happening throughout the church.
- We must birth to see life transformation in others.
Birthing brings life transformation on many levels. New leaders are challenged as they accept the call to group leadership. Current group members are energized as they see new life infused into their group as a result of birthing. New group member's lives are enhanced as they experience community, maybe for the first time.

Birthing with Success

- Continually Cast the Vision
It is said that in order for people to be aligned with a vision, they must be reminded of that vision every 30 days. Begin casting the vision of birthing in a positive light early, and continue to do so throughout the group's life. Focus on Jesus' call to connect more people to Him and to community. Help them to see how birthing provides more opportunities for others to experience the Christian community that has been so important in your own life. Also, use positive terms such as 'birthing' and 'group multiplication', rather than 'splitting' or 'dividing'.
- Prayer Through the Process
Prayer is powerful. Pray throughout the birthing process, from first mention until the birthing celebration. Pray for God's guidance for the leader and apprentice, acceptance of birthing for group members, inclusion of new group members, and success for the new groups formed through the birthing.

- **Understand your leadership needs.**
For two groups to form from one, there needs to be two leaders ready and able to lead. The group leader should identify an apprentice from within the group. Allow the apprentice to share leadership responsibilities. This will help prepare the apprentice to comfortably lead new group. Group members will also feel confident in the ability of the apprentice to lead a new group. Following birthing, each leader should begin identifying their own apprentice.
- **Acknowledge and discuss birthing pains.**
Recognize that when you mention birthing to group members, you are not just asking them to reproduce their small group. You are also asking them to change their Christian community, the community that provides their encouragement, accountability, and spiritual feeding. This may cause people to react with feelings such as fear, sadness, anger, and insecurity. These feelings must be affirmed and processed, both within and outside the group.
- **Know the proper time to birth.**
Birthing at the proper time is key to the health of both the existing group and the newly formed group(s). The best time to birth is after the group has spent sufficient time in the 'community phase' to enjoy authentic community (see attached Small Group Life Cycle). This stage is when a birthing plan should be in place and the group members understand when birthing will occur. If birthing is postponed too long, the group risks becoming stagnant.

The Birthing Process

- **First Trimester**
In this phase of birthing, the group is just being introduced to the concept of birthing and it's purpose. Cast the vision of birthing in a positive light from the beginning. When discussed early on, birthing will be a natural outcome of group life for members. Continue to pray through the birthing process and cast the vision. Sharing stories of successful births (yours or others) will help nurture the vision for group members. Identify an apprentice and allow the apprentice to begin trying on some of the pieces of leadership.
- **Second Trimester**
During this phase of birthing, group members will know they are 'expecting'. Begin discussing when the birthing will occur and set a 'due date'. Allow group members to share and process their feelings about the birthing, both within and outside of the group. Continue to cast the vision and pray through the birthing process. Allow the apprentice to lead a sub-group of members. This will help prepare the apprentice to comfortably lead new group. Group members will also feel confident in the ability of the apprentice to lead a new group.

- **Third Trimester**

At this point, the due date is nearing and the group is prepared for the birth. The third trimester generally represents the last study session prior to birthing. As before, continue to cast the vision and pray through the birthing process. Also consider using study materials centered on community outreach, sharing your faith, or influencing outsiders. Suggest the group use one or two of the last group meetings to talk discuss logistics and share their feelings about the impending birth.

- **Birthday**

Birthing is a time of joy and celebration. Take time to share stories of the growth members have experienced, prayers they saw answered, and the relationships built. Acknowledge the difficulties of the birth and be sure a reunion of group members is scheduled. Take time to pray over the new leader and the new groups that were formed from the birthing.

- **Post-Partum**

Host a reunion of group members to reconnect and enjoy fellowship. Also consider having the two new groups meet in one location, coming together for opening and closing prayers, but meeting separately for study discussion. Each leader should identify and utilize an apprentice within their own groups. Finally, be sure to communicate with ministry leaders on the birthing process went, what successes you experienced and what challenges that may need to be addressed.

Small Group Life Cycle

Phase I: Get to Know

- Members uncertain about the group
- Members feel awkward and excited
- Leader shares group vision and directs group
- Goal is relationship building

Phase II: Transparency

- Members feel safe to 'take off their masks'
- Members share pain, take risks, confront others
- Leader models, challenges, encourages, confronts
- Group moves from 'the' group to 'our' group

Phase III: Community

- Member relationships are real, caring, supportive
- Members moving forward in spiritual growth
- Member focus turns outward - inviting and serving
- Apprentice(s) developed
- Authentic community

Phase IV: Birth or Stagnation

Birth:

- Group embraces vision of outreach
- Group understands need to birth
- Group recognizes and addresses fears and pain
- Group develops birthing plan
- Group celebrates birth

Stagnation:

- Group stays in Phase III too long
- Too comfortable **or** not comfortable enough
- Spiritual growth and life transformation stagnates
- Leadership care and connection outside of group hard to maintain
- Open chair remains open

Small Group Curriculum for Birthing Groups

Go Fish

Adam Stanley

This study will encourage and equip you to live out Jesus' call to become fishers of men.

Sharing Christ Together: Evangelism, A Life Together Resource

Brett Eastman and Deanna Eastman

These six sessions expose us to the heart of Jesus as he shows and teaches his disciples how to have a vibrant witness that draws lost people in, so they can be shown the way home.

Connecting in Christ Together: Fellowship, A Life Together Resource

Brett Eastman and Deanna Eastman

These six sessions will show you Jesus' way of loving others "as I have loved you."

Building Community

John Ortberg

In this study of Acts, you will discover that God wants to do a fresh work among his people by the power of the Holy Spirit. You will find the pathway to authentic community, learn how to grow as a worshiper, and you will deepen your passion to invite others into the fellowship of Christ-followers we call the church.

Just Walk Across the Room

Bill Hybels

This study encourages and equips readers to routinely initiate spiritual conversations with those who don't know Christ.

For other suggested curriculum, go to www.groupcurriculum.org and select 'Influence on Outsiders' as a search Topic.